

SNOHOMISH COUNTY Charter Review Commission

Wednesday April 26, 2006
Public Meeting Room No. 1
First Floor, County Administration Building East
Everett, Washington

Commission Members Present: Mike Cooper, Kim Halvorson, Gail Rauch, Ryan Larsen, David Simpson, Christine Malone, Mark Bond, Jim Kenny, Kristin Kelly, Rick Ortiz, Eric Earling, Wendy Valentine, Barbara Cothorn Hawksford, and Dianne Symms.

Commission Members Excused: Rene Radcliff Sinclair.

Others in Attendance: Jim Cummins, Ron Ledford, Paul Blowers, Bob Dantini, Pam Daniels Ed Moats, Peter Camp, Debbie Mock, Steve Reinig, Allena Olson and other citizens.

Call to Order: Chair Cooper called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: Commissioner Kenny asked that a sentence on the third page, last paragraph of the minutes of the April 19th meeting be stricken.

ACTION: Commissioner Rauch made a motion that the minutes of April 12th and 19th be approved as corrected. Commissioner Simpson seconded that motion, and all commission members present unanimously approved it.

Approval of Agenda: **ACTION:** Commissioner Larsen made a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioners Earling and Rauch seconded the motion simultaneously, and all commission members present unanimously approved it.

Approval of Vouchers: There was a correction made to Commissioner Valentine's voucher. The corrected amount is \$34.07, and the corrected total is \$210.93.

ACTION: Commissioner Simpson made a motion to approve the vouchers as corrected. Commissioner Ortiz seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by all commission members present.

Guest Speaker: Snohomish County Clerk Pam Daniels. Ms. Daniels presented her opinion on several topics relating to the County Clerk's office, including whether or not the position should be elected or appointed, and the duties of the office, such as, recording court proceedings, summoning jurors, keeping records, and accounting. Please see the attached information for a more detailed description of Ms. Daniels presentation.

DISCUSSION: Commissioner Ortiz asked Ms. Daniels if she would have been appointed if the position would have been set up that way. Ms. Daniels replied that there was no way for her to know that, and therefore no reasonable way for her to answer that question.

Commissioner Ortiz continued, asking Ms. Daniels whose power would be taken away from if the position of County Clerk became an appointed position. Ms. Daniels stated that it would mostly be that the focus of the position would be different. The new focus of the County Clerk would be to serve the boss, not the people.

Commissioner Ortiz said that currently the participation of the County Clerk with the Judges of the court is voluntary and appointing the position would change that. He then asked if it would be taking power from the Clerk or the people. Ms. Daniels replied that judges are elected to judge and if there is an administrative problem during their term they are not often held accountable. She stated that it is the opposite for the elected Clerk.

Commissioner Kelly asked how the process of summoning would change if the position became appointed, and would it be less fair. Ms. Daniels replied that while Snohomish County has an outstanding bench, you are drawing on citizens of the county and that should be a neutral role. Commissioner Kelly continued, asking if it could look like judges were summoning a specific type of people. Ms. Daniels answered again that it would be in everyone's best interest for the summoning of jurors to have the look of pure fairness.

Commissioner Kelly asked how auditing would proceed if the position were appointed. Ms. Daniels said that everything would need to be audited.

Commissioner Bond asked for a tangible example of conflict that may occur if the County Clerk became an appointed position. Ms. Daniels stated that 85-90% of the budget is staff cost. Currently she must meet the needs of both the staff and the public and she wonders if it would remain fair if the judges were in control of determining the workload of the Clerk.

Commissioner Bond asked how it is that the judges get everything done now. Ms. Daniels replied that they currently meet with the Clerk and discuss what duties the Clerk can assist the judges with.

Commissioner Kenny stated that many courts have appointed clerks and there has been no outcry about such problems. District court also has an appointed administrator, is that system faulted? Ms. Daniels replied that the system is not bad just different. District Court is a totally different scenario, it is much smaller and the focus is different.

Commissioner Kenny asked if the District Court administrator should be elected. Ms. Daniels said she had no way of knowing the answer to that question.

Commissioner Valentine asked about making evening hours and other availability for the public as Snohomish County is a commuter county. Ms. Daniels replied that these ideas have real merit but it takes a lot to get them to become a reality. The biggest challenge being the availability of money for the cost of staff it would take for these ideas. Ms. Daniels stated that an effort was being made for the easier availability of information in the form of scanning and documenting.

Commissioner Larsen asked for examples of services that the County Clerk starts and hands off to the judges and vice versa. Ms. Daniels replied that there are many things that are shared but she could not think of anything specific right off the top of her head.

Commissioner Rauch asked Ms. Daniels if she thought the cost of appointing the position of County Clerk would be different than keeping it an appointed position. Ms. Daniels replied that the Salary Commission researched this topic. Appointed positions in other counties make much more than their elected equals.

Chair Cooper asked if clerks have the authority to lobby and present in Olympia for the people and judges. Ms. Daniels replied that the clerks have the ability to walk out of the office at any time to go down to Olympia and address what they feel necessary at the legislative level. Appointed Clerks are not able to do this if it were against the judges wishes.

Guest Speaker: Snohomish County Treasurer Bob Dantini. Mr. Dantini presented his opinion on the topics of term limits, the Salary Review Commission, independently elected officials, biennial budgets, and performance audits, among others. Please see the attached information for a more detailed description of Mr. Dantini's presentation.

DISCUSSION: Commissioner Malone stated that the public is in favor of term limits so that they don't end up with "career politicians", and asked what might change the public's perception of that. Mr. Dantini stated that he has heard different from the public and that it is always within the public's power to change those in elected positions.

Commissioner Bond asked if Mr. Dantini thought that the term limit information he had gathered from the public could support the appointment of positions. Mr. Dantini answered that he looks at election vs. appointment strictly from the independent/impartial standpoint.

Commissioner Kelly said that the County Clerk, Auditor, and Treasurer seem administrative and that it would be possible to have a few positions without term limits. Mr. Dantini replied that this scenario had been brought up previously and he feels it could come to fruition.

On the topic of biennial budgeting Commissioner Ortiz thought that the treasurer would want to be more accurate, and he asked how the biennial budget would help with this.

Mr. Dantini replied that accuracy is in reporting information. He stated that this was the first year that there were clean audit reports in Snohomish County, and that this is where he sees the importance of being accurate. He continued, saying that the budget process is simply justifying things over and over again, and it just doesn't seem worth it to go over the same things every year.

Commissioner Earling asked, regarding relative pay, if what the recent Salary Commission had come up with had been implemented where the Treasurer would be. Mr. Dantini replied that they are currently at \$92,000 and would be at \$98,500 in 2007. He mentioned that most Department Directors are over \$100,000 and nearing \$110,000 per year.

Commissioner Halvorson asked if Mr. Dantini were to advise someone coming into the Treasurer's position, how long would you tell them it would take to get acclimated. Mr. Dantini replied that it took him the first four years to get up to speed.

Commissioner Halvorson asked if moving the performance auditors under the executive cost more to the people, and if the money is available would it be best to contract it out. Mr. Dantini replied that it is always better to be audited by an independent entity.

Commissioner Rauch asked Mr. Dantini to give the Commission an idea of what the Treasurer does for a fire district. Mr. Dantini replied that they manage the cash distribute funds for those who don't issue their own, and manage investments

Public Comment: Paul Blowers, from Lakewood, spoke on the need for a County Government that is efficient and effective. He stated that the Sheriff and Assessor should be partisan positions, so that the public can keep track of who is in charge. He also stated that the County Auditor should definitely be a partisan position.

Chairs Comments: Chair Cooper introduced Rich Davis who will be the legal council for the Commission. He stated that the County Council finally approved the budget appropriation. On the topic of reimbursements Chair Cooper said that Steve Reinig has been in constant contact and the lengthy process is being addressed.

Chair Cooper and Commissioner Earling finished taping their show with Edmonds Community College and it is set to air in the early part of May.

Chair Cooper called attention to the memo sent out on the process of item selection. He asked that if there should be any changes he would like to address them at this time and get the process approved.

Chair Cooper started the selection process discussion by giving an example of a process used previously where topics were bundled into groups and those bundles were voted on for information gathering and further discussion.

Commissioner Kelly said that she would rather not vote on topics that were bundled. She felt that voting on each topic individually at this point would be a more efficient way to progress.

Chair Cooper replied that he had no problem using a different process, that he was giving an example of a process that was an option and that he was looking for the Commissioners thoughts on what process should be used.

Commissioner Hawksford suggested a selection process where each Commissioner would receive a certain number of stickers (or votes) and a list of the topics would be put out, and the Commissioners would put a sticker next to the topics that they wished to see move forward for further discussion. The topics on the list with the most stars would be the first to move forward.

Commissioner Halvorson suggested a process of selection by numerical ranking. Each Commissioner would assign a number, from 1 to 3, to each topic. Three being the topics that you would like to see move forward the most. The numbers given to each individual topic would then be counted and figured as a percentage and those topics with the highest percentages would move forward.

Commissioner Valentine asked that everyone keep in mind that at this point the voting is only about moving things forward.

Commissioner Earling reminded that the topics with eight votes simply go on to the staff for information gathering. That giving a topic your vote at this time only means that you would like more information on it, and would like to discuss it further.

ACTION: Commissioner Kelly made a motion that the electronic ranking be by yes or no votes, and that each topic be voted on individually. Commissioner Larsen seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by all Commission members present.

The process of item selection agreed on will be that electronic ranking will be sent to Steve Reinig, by Friday May 5th, to start the process. The Commission will then vote on each item separately (no bundling). There will also be the ability to re-table issues if enough support is generated for that specific issue.

Administrative Report: The final results of the third survey posted on Survey Monkey are in, and the fourth set is in place.

Included in the packet for tonight's meeting is a packet on grants management to read and absorb. It is only background information.

Meeting Adjournment: Chair Cooper adjourned the meeting at 8:32 p.m.

Minutes Submitted by:

Allena Olson
Recorder